Critics hail
symphony: 'best in U.S.'


By Bernard Jacobson
Daily News Music Critic

EDINBURGH, Scotland — The Chicago Symphony brought the second stage of its first European tour to a triumphant conclusion here Tuesday night with another sparkling concert under principal guest conductor Carlo Maria Giulini.

The orchestra has now hit its stride.

Brahm's Tragic 'Overture, Haydn's "Surprise" symphony and Ravel's "Rapsodie Espagnole" were all, in their widely differing styles, beautifully and idiomatically played, and shared a warm ovation with the excellent soloist, Rafael Orozco.

THE CRITICAL response continues overwhelmingly favorable. The important London Times described the Chicago Symphony as "the United States' most completely accomplished orchestra," and the Evening News spoke of "a truly great orchestra ... revealing artistic and unanimous strengths in every department, all in nice balance."

Now the players fly to Belgium, where they will give concerts in Ghent and Brussels.
music director George Childs told the orchestra they were to present their contribution to the city's cultural life with a formal concert.

The performance took place at Symphony Hall, home of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. The program included works by composers such as Beethoven, Mozart, and Debussy. The audience was eager to hear the orchestra's performance, and the concert was a resounding success.
Belgians Cheer Our Orchestra

BY THOMAS WILLES
Brussels, Belgium

THE PALAIS des Beaux Arts is no palace and its Grand Salle no great hall despite the name, but the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Georg Solti had the audience there standing and cheering Friday night. The 2,000-seat auditorium is part of a grey, unified monster containing five stages, concert halls and recital salons, suggesting that the Kennedy Center's edifice complex may be traced back at least two generations. The hall itself is oval and flat-topped, with a lot of air space for the sound to boom around in and unbroken plaster walls for obvious reflection. The acoustics' result is maximum bass response, good reinforcement of strings and brass and occasionally submerged winds.

There also were a few more ragged edges in the performance than there had been in the Edinburgh version of these same works—Elliott Carter Variations for Orchestra and Mahler's Fifth Symphony—but with Gent's Opera House still fresh in ear and nose, I am not about to complain too strongly.

Neither were the local newspaper critics. Jacques Stehman of the leading French language daily, Le Soir, called the ensemble "an amazing orchestra, without any doubt one of the most brilliant in the world, the prestige previously demonstrated on records now has been confirmed."

Max van der Maesbrugge of the Le Dernier Heure enthused: "What a splendid ensemble, for everybody is a prodigious master of his technique. The entire orchestra has amazing discipline: that the musicians care to give their utmost is exceptional."

And the anonymous critic of Gent's Het Volk, writing about Thursday's concert, praised the symphony's "fine phrasing, brilliant orchestral color and enormous competence."

Following Friday's concert, there was a reception for the players, staff and visiting Orchestral Association officials in Brussels' 19th century city hall. The reception was sponsored by the State of Illinois European Office and the Illinois Business community in Belgium. In the receiving line were John S. D. Eisenhower, United States ambassador to Belgium; Arthur A. Compton, European director of the Illinois Department of Business and Economic Development; Pierre van Halteren, alderman for fine arts of the city of Brussels; and Louis C. Sudier, president of the Orchestral Association.

After the party Mr. and Mrs. Solti left for Montreux, Switz., where Mr. Solti was to receive the Montreux International Recording Award at a dinner yesterday evening.
German Audience Symphony's Largest

BY THOMAS WILLIS

The largest audience to date on the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's European tour shouted and stamped their approval until long after conductor Georg Solti had motioned the men from the stage at the Jahrhunderthalle here tonight.

This concert hall, which resembles a smaller, more elegant version of the dour, University of Illinois Assembly hall, across the street from the plant of the giant L.G. Farben Chemical Works, the concert tonight was partially underwritten by the firm, which built the hall at its centennial celebration 25 years ago, before released for future release.

Concert Televised

The concert was also being stage temperature, making exxt.

The hot lights raised the stage temperature, making exact intension difficult and causing the perspiration to flow freely. An ugly plywood acoustical shell, streaked with gray and black to soften the video impression, surrounded the ensemble.

At the end of the recital, the audience first listened to the music before leaving the hall, and the windows were opened for an hour and barely had time to see their white ties before concert time, it must have been a draining experience.

The fatigue did not play a role in the performance, however. Mendelssohn’s overture to “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” Bartok’s “Music for Strings, Percussion and Celeste,” and the Tschaikovsky Sixth Symphony being played for the first time on the tour were sharply etched and exciting.

Poor Acoustics

Nobody will rave about the acoustics in this booming, mushroom eating hall and, anyone familiar with the orchestra’s sound in better surroundings knows that this wasn’t as good.

But the “Pathétique” was a model of its kind, unaccompanied and knurled to white heat. The audience ate it up, and gave Mr. Solti, who was a major figure in musical Frankfurt from 1932 to 1941, a warm enthusiasm homecoming.

Stockholm critics were a little more reserved in their praise than their colleagues earlier elsewhere in the tour. Her favorite characterized the symphony as “a stab to the sounds of social violence; the precision is good, the tone is there; the orchestra’s tone is pure, strong, clear and composed.”

As far as I could tell from a seat three rows from the string boxes, Thursday night’s Stockholm performance went much better. Another reviewer, presumably sitting in the local press seats, reported that theTchaikovsky demonstrated superior instrumental mastery; every category has a color and beauty and density of sound. We wonder how it is possible to reach such beauty. It was an altogether brilliant beginning of our annus horribilis,”

Last night the Chicago Symphony’s String Quartet visited the industrial suburb of Sodertalje, a 25 mile journey from central Stockholm. The moonlight ensemble—Victor Alay, Edgar Muenscher, Milton Prokov and Frank Miller—eastern itself well, particularly in the energetic Walter Piston String Quintet. This time the headline read: “Kvartet med Gustaf, ‘That’s what you get for working on a night off’—The Sound of Gold.”
Solti, Symphony triumph in 2d Berlin concert

By Robert C. Marsh  
Sun-Times Music Critic

BERLIN—The Chicago Symphony has known some great nights in its 80 years, not a few of them recently, but after its second Berlin concert Wednesday evening one had the sense that its musical stature had been amply demonstrated in a program that would be long remembered and long discussed by all who heard it or who participated in its realization.

On this occasion the conductor was Georg Solti, and in general he chose to underline the music of the evening, stressing the delicate interplay of tone color in a really quiet passage over the brute force of decibels.

Not that the decibels were lacking. The third movement of Tchaikovsky's "Pathétique" Symphony, with the matchless combination of the acoustics of the Berlin Philharmonic and the Chicago brass, produced an outburst of applause from even a sophisticated German audience.

BUT THIS was a well-calculated effect, a high point carefully chosen and carefully scaled into the musical development of the evening. Solti does not believe in shooting off cannon if he can get the same results with a whisper.

Thus he opened the evening with Mendelssohn's Overture to "A Midsummer Night's Dream," stressing the sense of fantasy that fills the music, the joy and magic that mark the play, and providing that the Chicago players could maintain beautifully flowing, uniform rhythms in a quick tempo while at the same time producing the softest and most refined sounds imaginable.

The Philharmonic proved to be the ideal place to hear Bartok's Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta, since the near-perfect sound reflection qualities of the stage brought out the antiphonal effects, the musical questions and answers across the stage, in a manner the composer might have imagined but, one suspects, rarely if ever heard.

IN THIS MUSIC the lyric quality of Bartok's writing is never very far away, but at the same time he is fascinated with the possibilities of rhythm, especially when metrical patterns are formed from sound sources distributed over a large stage area. One could not help but notice the immediate response of the musicians to the clarity and precision of Solti's beat. The rhythmic designs were strong and precise, yet always musical rather than mechanical in feeling.

NORMALLY one does not think of the "Pathétique" as an orchestral showpiece, but Solti made it one, proving once more that a conductor can secure a grand reception with a symphony that ends quietly. Provided the performance has been the kind to win ovations. This was Tchaikovsky without crocodile tears.

The soaring melodic phrases of the first movement were impassioned but controlled. The second movement sang its song above a quiet heartbeat in the timpani, opening the way to the march movement that set the air crackling. But Solti knew better than to let the work reach dramatic fulfillment before its true close, and the drama of the final adagio lamentoso, with its dark phrases spinning away softly into silence, was the resolution of the work.
Symphony Swells on Target in Vienna

By Robert C. Marsh

September 30, 1971

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES
Our Orchestra Praised in Milan

BY THOMAS WILLIS

Milan, Italy

The press reaction to Georg Solti and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's first engagement at the Teatro alla Scala here has been unexpectedly unanimous. Long strings of adjectives in the six Milanese newspapers praised the ensemble this morning. Even the usually unflappable Corriere della Sera critic, Franco Abbati, said the orchestra played "divinely. All shades of sonority and characterization were marvelously articulated, section by section, instrument by instrument, clear as crystal, splendid as solosists, with perfect control of all ranges of intensity, crescendo and diminuendo, from loudest to softest, throughout the entire expressive range."

There was no disagreement at all on the quality of the orchestra or the ability of Mr. Solti as the conductor. Giulio Confalonieri, the respected music historian and reviewer for II Giornale, said the conductor conquered the audience with his energy, capacity to command, sense of fantasy, and "footwork more agile than the pugilist, Monson." Benjamin de Fabbo, the third of the city's triumvirate of best known critics, said in today's II Giornale Mondiale that "there is a danger that orchestras of such ability may attain too much polish, creating a sort of technicolor phonorama of externals instead of serving the music. This the Chicago Symphony has avoided."

Even the Communist daily, II Unità, was equally enthusiastic about the "warm kneading of sounds and the Mediterranean sweetness of the strings," calling the concert "a ravishing performance" and "enthusiastically successful." There was only one fault, the critic concluded, no encore. "In the case of new orchestras at La Scala, this is always done [we hope Mr. Solti will remember this in the future]."

At last night's performance, the second of the three identical concerts here, Mr. Solti did indeed play the Overture to "The Barber of Seville" as an encore. As noted by the reviewers who attended Monday night, the Mendelssohn-Bartok-Brahms program was a most successful recipe for success reports from those present both times said that the old-line subscribers who attended last night clapped a little less than Monday's audience. To this reviewer, sitting in a center box in the second rank, it was Mr. Solti's best performance of the tour - relaxed, firmly in control and aware of the interacting needs of players, audience and hall.

[Chicago Tribune Press Service]
Paris hall can’t dim our orchestra

By Robert C. Marsh
Sun-Times Music Critic

PARIS — According to one theory, French bread tastes the way it does because of French flour, rather than anything else in the recipe. And after hearing the Chicago Symphony in the Theater of the Palais de Chaillot Saturday night, one is faced with the disconcerting thought that French orchestras sound the way they do because of French concert halls.

For Jean Martinon labored for five years to get a proper French sound from the Chicago ensemble, and never in that time did he achieve the quality the orchestra revealed in this program directed by Georg Solti. The trouble is, I don’t think Solti was even striving for a markedly French sound. It just came out that way.

This concert room is one of the deanest acoustically I have ever heard. Even the biggest orchestral climax vanishes instantaneously, and in the Bartok Concerto for Orchestra I had the impression that the Chicago players were ensconced in a huge padded box that not only swallowed up low frequencies with an insatiable appetite but took all the body and character out of their distinctive tone.

I WOULD NEVER have recognized this as the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. But, despite this loss of identity, the effect was pleasing and, if anything, should be stressed, the Paris audience (heavily weighted with young people) was rapturously enthusiastic, applauding in hearty rhythmic cadences after the Bartok.

Further vigorous response followed the First Symphony of Brahms.

What happened is that everything was reduced to its fundamentals. The high overtones so characteristic of the Chicago orchestra that give color and strength to its sound, simply were not projected with any force, so the sound became extremely lean and clear with unusual colorings like filtered light. Another major factor was the lack of bass. Normally one takes for granted that the Chicago orchestra produces a lot of low frequency tone from its violas, cellos, and basses, and when this ‘drops in intensity (when even the timpani are thinned out) the entire tonal balance is altered severely.

The way things went, the Mendelssohn Overture to a Midsummer Night’s Dream was quite effective, lightly scored music that seemed to drift into the auditorium as a sort of haze of sound. It was very delicate, and Solti’s stress on the interplay of line and color was most effective.

THEN CAME the Bartok. If one had heard the Milan performance, you never would have guessed it was the same orchestra or the same tour. Everything was different. It was interesting. An experience which one thought one could anticipate and which turned out to be something entirely unexpected, but as a realization of Bartok’s score it lacked the weight of registration I consider essential in this music.

The Brahms was beautifully played. Its repetitions in recent days have brought refinement to a performance that already possessed aristocratic character. But this is a symphony in which climax pages must be permitted to build onward and upward, which means the orchestral tone must be supported by a reasonable amount of resonance in the hall. When this does not happen, as was the case here, a major effect is lost.

The result is that the Chicago players won a significant success in the French capital and, paradoxically, they did so with the least satisfying concerts of those I have heard on the tour. But the shortcomings of the evening were certainly due to the hall rather than the musicians. And even the intensity of Solti’s direction could carry them only so far.